

LXXIV. *Observations on noxious Animals in England ; by the Rev. Richard Forster, M. A. Rector of Shefford in Bucks.*

Read March 11,
1762.

Graunt, in his observations upon the London bills of mortality, tells us, that we have “ an abhorrence of toads and “ snakes, as most poisonous creatures, whereas few “ men dare say, upon their own knowledge, they ever “ found harm by either.” This was published near a century ago; and as this century may be properly called the age of experiments, it is a wonder, that some fair trials have not been made, to ascertain what animals are really noxious. I need not enumerate the good effects, that would attend such an examination, as that it would tend to take off that abhorrence, mentioned by Graunt, whereby the boldest man shrinks, upon coming too near one of these animals; as also, that it would save the lives of numberless innocent, perhaps useful creatures.

The viper and slow-worm are, as far as I know, held to be poisonous by every body. The viper there can be no dispute about. As to the slow-worm, I have had two fair trials, to conclude, that his bite is quite harmless. The following is an exact detail of the circumstances. In June 1751, I had a woman, Jane Seymour, of this place, helming of straw, i. e. laying it straight, for the thatcher. It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and the weather extremely hot, when the poison of all animals is reputed strongest. The woman squalled out, all of a sudden, that an adder

adder (viper) in the straw had stung her by the finger. I was by at the time, and her finger bled indeed. The woman's husband, who served thatcher, flew to the place in an instant, and turning up the straw, found a slow-worm, and killed him directly. I knowing they generally lie in pairs, ordered the man to look farther, for that assuredly he had a companion, and accordingly the other was quickly found. During this bustle, the woman's ailment was quite forgot, and she fell to work again, as if nothing had happened. My wife, indeed, about an hour afterwards, hearing of the accident, dressed the wound with salad oil, and caused the woman to drink two or three spoonfulls of the same ; but as this was done so long after the fact, I looked upon it as doing of nothing.

The second accident happened in the beginning of July 1754, to the husband of the above-mentioned woman, John Seymour, of this town ; who in removing the ground-pinning of some houses, which had been burnt down, and which I had the care of rebuilding, cried out, that he was stung by a blind-worm, for so they call them here. I was by, and saw the reptile stick to his thumb ; for the man lifted it some distance from the ground, before it quitted its hold. He was bit indeed ; for the punctures appeared very plain, and in a very dangerous place, just upon the tendon, on the inside of his thumb. The poor fellow was sadly frightened ; he looked as pale as death, and said, He should drop down dead in a minute. I smiled, and told him, as much as his wife did two or three years before. Upon this he took heart, fell again to his work, and heard no more of his accident.